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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 STOCKHOLM 000119

SIPDIS

STATE PLEASE PASS TO DHS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CPAS](#) [CVIS](#) [CMGT](#) [PREL](#) [SW](#)

SUBJECT: STOCKHOLM'S ESTA IMPLEMENTATION (NOV 2008-FEB 2009)

REF: (A) 08 STOCKHOLM 0474 (B) 08 STOCKHOLM 0554 (C) 08 STOCKHOLM
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STOCKHOLM 00000119 001.2 OF 002

11. Summary: The January 12, 2009 mandatory implementation of the ESTA program has proceeded smoothly in Sweden. Post's media outreach resulted in a series of ESTA-related articles in the national Swedish media, and this and other outreach efforts appear to have helped inform the public at-large of the new requirements. Post did experience an initial surge of ESTA inquiries that overwhelmed Post phone systems, but this has abated - although one-third of all consular inquiries continue to be ESTA-related. Post has also interviewed approximately 75 percent of the 54 Swedes denied ESTA (out of approximately 36,000 who applied). Based on daily experience with travelers in Sweden, Post assesses that a central issue with the ESTA program is that many applicants neglect to write down their ESTA application number and cannot retrieve it without deluging DHS with assistance emails that are taking weeks to answer. In order to make ESTA more user-friendly and facilitate travel, Post recommends that the ESTA application be amended to allow applicants to automatically email the application number to themselves at the time of approval. End Summary.

ESTA OPERATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION

12. APPLICANTS DENIED ESTA: The latest information from DHS indicates that approximately 36,000 Swedish citizens have applied for ESTA, with only 54 denied. As of February 12, 2009, Post has interviewed approximately three-quarters of those denied, mostly for previous arrests, lost or stolen passports (LASP), and visa overstay/turnarounds. Most of these cases were subsequently overcome/waived at Post and approved. It appears that Swedish LASP data has been incorporated into ESTA's clearance process, resulting in a number of hits for travelers who had reported their passports lost, but later recovered and continued to use them. Combined with ESTA, this sharing of lost/stolen passport information is increasing our ability to ensure that applicants do not use invalid passports for travel to the United States.

13. UTILIZING ESTA RESOURCES TO ADDRESS QUESTIONS: The week after the January 12 implementation date of ESTA saw a significant increase in public inquiries to the Embassy. The call volume was so significant on January 12, 2009 that the Embassy's phone system was overwhelmed. Since then, calls have leveled off, but ESTA-related calls and emails continue to account for one-third of all consular-related inquiries. The majority of questions concern what applicants should do if they entered their information incorrectly

in the ESTA application. Post followed up with DHS regarding this issue, and was informed by DHS of two steps applicants can take:

-- If the application resulted in an ESTA denied and the traveler believes they answered a question in error, they now only have to wait 24 hours (not 10 days) before reapplying for ESTA approval online.

-- If the application resulted in an ESTA approved but the traveler believes they entered incorrect personal data, they can send an email to ESTA@CBP.DHS.gov with their name, application number if available, and the passport number and DHS will need to remove their application in order for them to reapply. We do note, however, that applicants have reported that DHS can take several weeks to respond to applicant inquiries.

ESTA WEBSITE FRAUD HAPPENS IN SWEDEN

14. On November 12, 2008 major Swedish newspaper, Aftonbladet ran a story noting that links to fraudulent ESTA sites requesting payment were inadvertently placed on the main Swedish airline/airport Website (Fraudulent links included: www.esta.us; www.esta.co.uk; and www.travelauthorization.org). Airport authorities discovered the error and removed the link the same day. In addition to following up with airline representatives to make sure they had the correct information, on November 13, 2008, Post sent out an updated media advisory note describing the ESTA program and warning of fraudulent ESTA Websites.

POST'S ONGOING OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

STOCKHOLM 00000119 002.2 OF 002

15. Post coordinated a variety of outreach activities in the lead-up and days surrounding the January 12, 2009 mandatory implementation of the ESTA program. Some of these efforts and press outputs included:

-- December 12, 2008: Major local Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet ran a story on ESTA regulations (with Embassy input).

-- December 30, 2009: Post sent out and posted on the Embassy website a media advisory on the upcoming January 12 implementation date.

-- January 12, 2009:

Swedish Television twice played a thirty-second interview with the APAO on the ESTA program. Swedish Radio played the same interview during several spots.

Aftonbladet ran a newspaper article that included an interview with Scandinavian Airlines spokesman who noted that airlines would receive a grace period from fines until March and that the program had been running smoothly. Note: Local airport contacts inform Post they still do not have computer access to see whether travelers have an approved ESTA.

Several local specialist travel magazines reiterated the new ESTA regulations in their January 2009 editions.

Conoff briefed several hundred travel agents and other tourism industry representatives at the semi-annual gathering of "Discover America," an industry organization that promotes travel to the U.S. Conoff also had a booth at the event for several hours, and answered in-depth questions from participants and press regarding ESTA.

-- January 19, 2009: Swedish Television covered the new ESTA program (with Embassy input) during its weekly Monday travel program. The program noted that one can be denied boarding/entry to the United States if they do not complete the form, that it only takes a couple of minutes to complete, and that it is valid for two years, unless

one changes their name or passport. The story also referred viewers to the Embassy website for more information.

POST RECOMMENDATION FOR ESTA - MOVING FORWARD

16. Post will continue to reach out to Swedish stakeholders and the public in order to ensure the continued smooth implementation of the ESTA program into the busy summer travel season. Based on daily experience with travelers in Sweden, Post would also like to make a recommendation that we believe will help improve the friendliness of ESTA and facilitate travel to the United States. Applicants often forget to write down or lose their ESTA application number when they apply on-line and subsequently cannot confirm whether or not they have received an approval or update travel information. Currently, we refer them to the DHS helpline, but we are aware it can often take weeks for them to receive the necessary information to know if they have an approved ESTA. In order to facilitate travel, Post recommends that the ESTA application, which already requests applicant's email address, automatically email the applicant their confirmation number at the time of approval.